

OREGON TERRITORY.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 658.]

FEBRUARY 16, 1847.

Mr. McCLEARNAND, from the Committee on Public Lands, made the following

REPORT :

The Committee on Public Lands, to whom was referred so much of the annual message of the President of the United States as relates to the territory of Oregon, in the following words, to wit: "It will be proper, also, to establish a surveyor general's office in that territory, and to make the necessary provision for surveying the public lands, and bringing them into market. As our citizens who now reside in that distant region have been subjected to many hardships, privations, and sacrifices in their emigration, and by their improvements have enhanced the value of the public lands in the neighborhood of their settlements, it is recommended that liberal grants be made to them of such portions of these lands as they may occupy, and that similar grants or rights of pre-emption be made to all who may emigrate thither within a limited period, to be prescribed by law?"—have had the same under consideration, and report the following correspondence, and also a bill.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
January 11, 1847.

SIR: As a member of the "Committee on Public Lands," I have the honor to address to you the following interrogatories upon a subject depending before that committee.

*First.* Is it advisable to establish a "base line" and "meridian" in the terms of any law to be enacted directing the survey of the public lands in the territory of Oregon?

*Secondly.* Is it advisable to limit the surveys of said territory to any particular part of the same; and if so, to what part? Whether to the region between the Rocky and Blue mountains, or to the region between the Blue and the Cascade mountains, or to the region between the last-mentioned range and the Pacific ocean, or to any other part less than the whole?

*Thirdly.* Is it advisable at present to establish a system of land sales in said territory; and if so, what price per acre would probably reimburse to the government the cost of acquiring, surveying, and disposing of said lands?

Your early attention is respectfully invited to these questions, with the hope and belief that the answers to be afforded will prove highly useful.

Your obedient servant,

JOHN A. McCLERNAND.

Hon. ROBERT J. WALKER,  
*Secretary of the Treasury.*

P. S.—The above is the substance of a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Treasury.

GENERAL LAND OFFICE, *January 12, 1847.*

SIR: In accordance with your directions, endorsed on the inquiries of the Hon. J. A. McClernand, of yesterday, I have the honor to report:

1. That from the best information in this office, the forty-second parallel of north latitude would probably form the best base line; and, from the nature of the country, a line running north and south, through the mouth of the Willamette river, the most suitable meridian for the surveys in Oregon; and to establish those lines by law would avoid an expensive and laborious investigation to ascertain whether any better can be found, and prevent uncertainty and delay in commencing operations; hence it would appear advisable to do so.

2. That portion of Oregon lying between the Rocky and Blue mountains is represented as rocky, broken, and barren, stupendous mountainous spurs traversing it in every direction, affording but little level ground, while in its most elevated parts snow lies nearly all the year; it rarely rains there, and no dew falls. The region between the Blue and Cascade mountains consists, it is stated, for the most part of a light sandy soil, the valleys being rich alluvion, and the hills barren. The country between the Cascade mountains and the Pacific, in which it is suggested above that the base line and meridian shall be established, is represented as well adapted for agriculture and stock farms. That the most of it is well timbered with fir, pine, spruce, oak, poplar, maple, &c., while the grass, either green or dry, furnishes a nutritious food for cattle, on which they subsist in good condition throughout the year. Hence it would probably be expedient to require the first surveys to be made in this region, and authorize the extension of them as the wants of the settlers and the public interests may require.

3. Until the surveys shall have progressed considerably, it is not probably necessary to establish a land office in Oregon. The President could be authorized, however, as has been done in several cases, to establish a land office at the most convenient point within the surveys, after they shall have been made, and appoint land officers.

In the mean time the surveyor general could be authorized to receive, note, and file all applications or documents in relation to claims or titles to lands in that region, and to issue such evidences of title as would prevent conflict or collision amongst the settlers.

Estimating the cost of surveying in Oregon at the highest price now paid, to wit, eight dollars per mile, and making a very liberal allowance for meanders, the whole, embracing all expenses incident thereto, as salary

of surveyor general, clerk hire, &c., will not probably exceed 5 cents per acre.

The actual average cost of selling and managing the public lands, embracing every expense connected therewith, has been found upon examination to be  $5\frac{1}{10}$  cents per acre; total,  $10\frac{1}{10}$  cents per acre.

If it be determined that these lands shall reimburse the government for every outlay, the average cost of extinguishing the Indian title should be added to the above, if the wandering tribes in that region can be considered as having any right in the soil. Estimating the average cost of extinguishing their title to be the same as that paid the Indians in the west and south, it would amount to about  $9\frac{1}{10}$  cents per acre, making the total cost  $19\frac{1}{10}$  cents (say 20 cents) per acre. Mr. McClernand's letter is herewith returned.

With great respect, your obedient servant,

JAMES H. PIPER,  
*Acting Commissioner.*

Hon. R. J. WALKER,  
*Secretary of the Treasury.*